IMELDA MARCOS CONVICTED OF CORRUPTION, SENTENCED

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By **Robert H. Reid**

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MANILA, SEPT. 24 (FRIDAY) -- Former Philippine first lady Imelda Marcos was convicted on two criminal corruption charges here today and sentenced to prison terms of 9 to 12 years on each count.

The convictions ended the first of many criminal trials pending for the widow of former Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos, who was accused of massive corruption during a 20-year rule that ended with his ouster seven years ago. At present, Imelda Marcos is the target of 94 criminal and civil cases charging her with malfeasance, misappropriation and theft during her family's years in power, which prosecutors say left her with an illicit fortune estimated at $10 billion.

The special three-judge anti-corruption court also convicted former transport minister Jose Dans on the same counts and sentenced him exactly as they did Marcos. The two were charged with entering into five government contracts in which a state-run rail line awarded property leases to the Philippine General Hospital Foundation at favorable rates.

Marcos's lawyer said she would appeal the conviction, and the court allowed a previous bail bond to stand, permitting Marcos to remain free pending the outcome of that appeal.

Marcos immediately left the courthouse, waving and smiling to her supporters as she was driven away in a white limousine. Court officials said she presented no evidence during the trial, but Marcos had claimed previously that the money from the hospital leases helped finance a cardiac care center. Prosecutors did not challenge the claim but maintained that the foundation should have been charged more.

A popular revolt forced the Marcoses from power and into exile in Hawaii in 1986, but the succeeding goverment of President Corazon Aquino waited more than five years before filing criminal charges to recover money allegedly stolen by them, deferring instead to U.S. prosecutors who charged the couple with racketeering. But Ferdinand Marcos died in 1989, before the trial, and his wife was acquitted by a federal court jury in Manhattan in 1990. The following year, she was allowed to return to the Philippines, where she ran unsuccessfully for president in May 1992.

Most of the known Marcos assets are in Switzerland, and Imelda Marcos's supporters are hoping to use objections filed over the current proceedings to discredit the Philippine justice system to Swiss

authorities. In 1990, the Swiss Federal Tribunal ruled that $350 million in Swiss banks could be returned to the Manila government if a Philippine court convicted Imelda Marcos in a fair trial. Today's cases are not related to the Swiss accounts, but Marcos supporters hope that by alleging bias in the court system, they can raise doubts about the propriety of future verdicts.